

November 2008

THE POSSIBILITY OF FAILURE

Few things define our character so much as the way we deal with failure.

Anyone who tries to achieve something worthwhile in life runs the risk of failure. We can fail in countless ways and most successful people have done so at one time or another. There is no shortage of inspirational stories about remarkable people who succeeded only after having experienced the bitter taste of defeat. We find examples of this in the lives of business executives, entrepreneurs, authors, artists, teachers, and just about any other field of human endeavor. Failure is a distinct possibility in the spiritual life as well. It is naïve to assume that lofty motives insure the realization of one's goals. Success is not guaranteed, at least in the short run. Of course, there is one sure way to avoid failure: don't even try.

Sometimes we fail because our goal is unrealistic. If I decide to learn meditation and set an immediate goal of meditating 2 hours per day, what are the chances that I may not make it past, say, the first week? But if I am serious, I recalibrate my daily goal to a sensible level of 15 - 20 minutes per day and gradually increase the amount time as I gain proficiency.

In other cases, the goals are within our reach but we simply don't try hard enough. This type of failure is fundamentally due to a lack of enthusiasm, an inability to sustain the necessary effort required to realize our dreams. Without enthusiasm, our spiritual aspirations may be short lived, being quickly overshadowed by the pressing weight of worldly priorities. If we lack the essential ingredient of enthusiasm, we need to be brutally honest and ask ourselves how serious we are about living the spiritual life.

Then there are those cases of failure where the goal was reasonable, the desire was strong, and a sincere and sustained effort was made. Failure occurred not because of a lack of enthusiasm or dedication, but because of inherent weaknesses and limitations.

A Theosophist is able to face personal failures with the knowledge that for the immortal Self there is no failure. "If thou hast tried and failed, O dauntless fighter, yet lose not courage: fight on and to the charge return again, and yet again." This inspirational line from *The Voice of the Silence* encourages us to summon the courage to try again even though we have momentarily fallen. So we get up. And we try again.

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